



# OTATARA PIGEON POST

NUMBER 47

MARCH 2013

Hello folks! Welcome to *Otatara Pigeon Post*, the newsletter of the Otatara Landcare Group. In this issue we bring you news of the latest happenings in Otatara and snippets of information about our past. Also read about some ideas to improve our environment. We are also giving you a calendar of events the Landcare Group is holding during 2013. Keep it handy!

***Thanks to the Invercargill City Council for sponsoring the printing of this issue of the Otatara Pigeon Post for delivery to all residents of Otatara. To receive future email copies of the Pigeon Post contact the Otatara Landcare Group secretary, Chris Rance, at [rances@ihug.co.nz](mailto:rances@ihug.co.nz)***

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**OTATARA  
LANDCARE GROUP**

# Mission Statement

To focus attention of Otatara residents and others on the natural features and ecological values of the Otatara environment, especially native forest and wetland flora and fauna. To promote and where possible facilitate the protection, restoration and creation of such features in the interests of scientific appreciation and intrinsic worth and to encourage community appreciation of these values.

## Objectives

- To act as a liaison forum for Otatara landowners, with the ICC, SRC, DOC and other agencies, in issues of land use and management of natural resources.
- To provide information to Otatara residents and other landowners on how best to manage and enhance natural areas, including weed and pest management.
- To advocate for the preservation and enhancement of forest remnants and other natural values of the Otatara area (including New River Estuary, Sandy Point and Oreti Beach).
- To promote increased use of native plants in gardens and on properties in Otatara.
- To improve the habitat for native wildlife in the Otatara area.
- To run a programme of activities which

will include bush walks, field days and talks to improve knowledge of the local environment, and working bees to help individuals and organisations with their environmental projects.

- To promote Otatara's natural areas to local people and visitors through publicity (newsletter, leaflets, e.g., Gamble's Educational Boardwalk).

## Your Committee

Please contact any of the Otatara Landcare Group committee members if you have questions, ideas or problems relating to the Otatara and Sandy Point areas.

**Chairperson** – Barry Smith, (ph. 213 1500)

**Secretary** – Chris Rance, (ph. 213 1161)

**Treasurer** – Glenda Graham, (ph 213 1397)

### Committee:

Brian Rance, ph. 213 1161

Randall Milne, ph. 213 0851

Russell Evans, ph. 213 0530

May Evans, ph. 213 0530

Lloyd Esler, ph. 213 0404

Edith Jones, ph. 213 1571

Cathy Macfie, ph. 213 1267

Linda Jackson, ph. 213 1571

Sally Duston, ph. 213 1403

Nathan Cruickshank, ph. 213 0729

# Chairspeak – a message from the Chairperson

*Barry Smith*

Life is a constant change and in our family things have certainly changed in the last week. Two years ago our eldest daughter Hilary finished high school and left for the University of Otago to study Commerce. Our thoughts at the time were that with half of our children gone from home then we would have the time that we used to spend with her to ourselves. However we did not plan on what Fiona, our youngest, had planned. She is what you would call 'extremely fluid' and managed to flow nicely into the gaps that her older sister left, so life just continued being busy as normal. From 2009 to 2012 we hosted four girls for varying lengths of time; Aviaja from Greenland we had for a year, Miriam from Germany we had for 5 months, Inga from Germany we had for 2 months and Minabu from Japan was just a short visit at 10 days. These are all our girls, there is a little bit of each one that has stayed with us and we consider ourselves very privileged to have had them as part of our family. If you have ever thought of hosting an overseas student then we would well recommend it. It is very interesting, rewarding and a lot of fun but also a lot of hard work.

However, this year the change has really hit. Fiona is now off to Canterbury University to study a BSc in Geology and Hilary has also gone back to Otago. The house is really quiet and Robyn and I find ourselves rattling

around inside a bit. Even when we are together it is quiet. Oh well, I guess this is just the next stage of life and no doubt the noise will start up again for short periods when they both arrive home for visits.

Life indeed does change and I have made the decision to make a major change in my life this year and that has been to stop running a business and return to study, probably at the SIT. This will (hopefully) happen on the 1st of April (and no, this is no April Fools Day joke). I had thought of studying something in Mathematics and Physics, something I knew I could handle, however to study this at a tertiary level one needs to travel to a university somewhere or do it on line. Personally I wanted something a little more structured than online and I wasn't prepared to move at this stage, so I began looking at the list of courses at the SIT. Starting at the bottom I felt that toenail polishing wasn't quite in my line and going up from there I found that I could probably handle a diploma in Health and Safety Management. However there are always things that trip you up and this may not be possible as I will need to have at least one day a week of employment where I have access to a business's Health and Safety stuff such as hazards registers and accident reports. If this option fails then I may do a Certificate in Alternative Energy.



Lloyd Esler and students from Southland Girls' High School at Bushy Point recently.

On 19-20 February we welcomed the Southland Girls' High School year 7 girls to Bushy Point. This is something we have done since 2007 having missed only one year due to inclement weather. Those first girls we had here that year are now in their final year at school and judging by the calibre of student SGHS and other Southland secondary schools have contributed to the community, then we are going to see a really fantastic bunch of young adults.

This year we are also looking forward to the 3rd year of the *Living Legends* project. We hope to have another 4,000 plants in the ground ready to make a new forest in just a few short years.

Enjoy your life, enjoy what you do and above all else, enjoy your family as well as the spirit of our children as they change from dependence to independence and from children to young adults.

## Get connected!

The Otatara Landcare Group is keen to distribute as much information about the natural aspects of living in Otatara as possible. So if you want to be on the email list to receive news about Otatara Landcare Group events and the *Otatara Pigeon Post* newsletters, email Chris Rance at [rances@ihug.co.nz](mailto:rances@ihug.co.nz). If you are not on our current email list you will miss out on future issues of the *Otatara Pigeon Post*, as this is the only issue of the year that will be delivered to all Otatara residents.

In future we will be looking at a one-off rather than annual Otatara Landcare Group joining fee and also maintaining an email and hard copy list of Otatara Landcare Group supporters. This will be discussed at the AGM in May.

# Why do you live in Otatara?

*Chris Rance reports on a survey undertaken by the Otatara Community Group*

In 2008 the Otatara Community Group surveyed Otatara Residents and found the following results from those who chose to reply. If these reasons reflect your own views, particularly if you are interested in the bush and its birdlife, then join the Otatara Landcare Group's email list and we will keep you up to date with what's happening in the natural playground in which we live. Email [rances@ihug.co.nz](mailto:rances@ihug.co.nz)

Of those who replied to the survey the 10 most frequently mentioned reasons that people said they choose to live in Otatara are:

- 1 The Bush
2. Quiet/peaceful/tranquil
3. Birdlife
4. Privacy
- 5 Close to Invercargill
6. Large sections
- 7 Open space
- 8 Semi-rural
- 9= Rural outlook
- 9= Close to beach

# Bushhaven Native Bird Rehabilitation Trust update

*May Evans*

At 49 Bryson Road we have already released three kereru this year and hope to release some more soon.

We have one tui which is flying a little but cannot be released – we hope to send it to an aviary somewhere else to live in comfort, and several kereru, some of which are nearly ready for release.

We can also take orders for window transfers – the main cause of injuries to kereru is hitting windows and there are certainly many more of them in Otatara than there used to be. At certain times of the day the light shows a bird the reflection of trees in windows and they fly into what they assume is free space. A transfer of a flying bird on the window tends to show the real birds the space is NOT free and they generally don't fly there.

Bubs – our show-stopper, has a new mate – see our website, [www.bushhaven.org](http://www.bushhaven.org)

# Bushy Point Restoration Area

*Chris Rance*

Those who have walked the Bushy Point walk or attended the *Living Legends* plantings over recent times can see this is a BIG project for a community group and its volunteers to undertake. The restoration area is 14 hectares and the wider pest control area is over 90 hectares. Around 10,000 native plants have been planted over the 10 years prior to Living Legends and another 10,000 plants will have been planted in the last three years. Some of you may have helped plant these plants on the organised planting days. But.... that's not the end of the story and weed control and ongoing maintenance is now our biggest challenge.

Your committee and all Otatara Landcare Group members are volunteers and your help is needed to keep this project going in the future. We have put together a programme of regular fun and working sessions in this newsletter, but to keep in touch with what's on or changes to the programme please send an email to Chris Rance – [rances@ihug.co.nz](mailto:rances@ihug.co.nz) and we will add you to our email list for future electronic *Otatara Pigeon Post* editions and events notices. The first event is Sunday 17 March and we will be covering the last year's *Living Legends* plants with rabbit covers, as our previous attempts to control rabbits have not been successful.

Although we have set up an exciting programme of events for you to be

involved in, if you would just like to help out at a time convenient to you, contact events coordinator Sally Duston, ph 213 1403 and she will advise what jobs can be done in your own time. Or maybe you have a group of friends that could adopt a job or area of work to help out with.

If you can't help with the physical jobs then why not give a donation which can help pay for the many expenses the project incurs such as plants, traps, baits, herbicide, plant covers, fencing, track work, interpretation, children's activities resources and picnic tables.



Volunteers help with planting at Bushy Point during the *Living Legends* project in 2012

## ***Living Legends planting at Bushy Point***

[www.livinglegends.co.nz](http://www.livinglegends.co.nz)

*This year's Living Legends planting will be held at Bushy Point on 23-24 August 2013. The schools planting will be on Friday 23 August and Living Legends will be in touch with your school to help out.*

*The family planting day will be Saturday 24 August 2013 from 9am-noon and we are preparing for it now! Areas have been identified for planting and will be prepared (with your help) for the planting days. Native plants (3,500) are being grown and looked after and ground preparation planning work has commenced.*

*If you have been involved in previous Living Legends planting events you should have already received an email notifying of this years event. If you haven't attended before please register for the event at [www.livinglegends.co.nz](http://www.livinglegends.co.nz)*

## **Kereru Award**

*Lloyd Esler*

Here it is – Otatara Landcare Group's new award to encourage children to take an interest in practical conservation!



### **Kereru Award (Conservation Badge)**

Try these five activities to achieve your badge:

- Pot up ten native seedlings and maintain them until they are ready to be used in a restoration project.
- Adopt a stretch of road, walkway, riverbank or beach and keep it free of litter for a month.
- Improve the family's recycling arrangements.
- Assist with an organised conservation activity such as a bird survey, weed eradication or habitat restoration.
- Focus on one particular local pest plant or animal and reduce its numbers over a month, or select a useful species and boost its population.

No posters, no pandas, no whales, no kakapos, no internet! For advice on your project, contact Lloyd Esler, ph **213 0404**.

# **Bushy Point digital photographic competition and 'The Moods of Bushy Point'**

*Sally Duston*

We're pleased you're interested in joining in our photographic events, to encourage you to get out and about around Bushy Point and see what's going on there.

## **Digital photographic competition**

*This is intended to be a fun competition (no professionals – no big prizes), in digital photographic form. Topic - Anything spied at Bushy Point.*

Bring along your device containing your image/s to be screened. There will be a popular vote by those present (this could defy all rules of serious photographers!). You may also talk about your entry and there may be a prize.

## **'The Moods of Bushy Point'**

*(just for sharing – non-competitive)*

This is intended to be something along the lines of your short, sharp impressions of Bushy Point – show five images of interesting things. It can be anything – birds on the sewage ponds, haymaking, kite flying – anything you have seen at Bushy Point. Say a few words about your findings. The photo showings will be held on Monday 2 September at Russell and

May Evans' home, 49 Bryson Road, starting at 7.30pm.

If you want to know more about this event, give Sally Duston a call - ph 213 1403.

### **New Otatara Landcare Group Website**

*The Otatara Landcare Group is working on a new website for 2013. The website will include all aspects of Otatara Landcare Group activities, past copies of the Otatara Pigeon Post, the Natural Otatara booklet, as well as an up-to-date calendar of events. Look out for childrens activities pages and resources too. Watch this space!*



# A walk on the mild side - Kilmock Bush

## Footloose

Remember the stories of dragons, witches, goblins and haunted forests of your childhood? If you're younger than me then the Hobbits will be what you relate to. Well, I know a place that at dusk any evening will flood your memory with scenes right out of a witchy forest story. Gnarled, twisted, black, dour trees with many hidden faces and characters, you only have to look closely to see them. However other more friendly things are there for you as well, so come with me while I walk this walk.

Kilmock Bush right here in Otatara is the place you need to see. Hard right immediately after crossing the Oreti River on your way to the beach is Fosbender Park (for those of you over 45 you will know it as 'Suspender Park'); the walk begins here. Starting as a four-wheel drive track it heads through the usual broom, blackberry, convolvulus and pines with scads of Muehlenbeckia smothering everything (it's a native but out of control!). Here I saw a pigeon drinking out of a puddle. Apparently when kereru eat lots of miro berries they become very thirsty and come down to the forest floor to drink from puddles. Unfortunately this is when predators pounce on them.

This was to be the start of a walk punctuated with bird song and interesting

plant life. Dogs are allowed here BUT under control, joggers are allowed too but they're not always under control so keep your ears open for puffing/panting sounds. Pushchairs could be a problem unless you've conned someone able to heft it up steps to come along. The track surface is excellent, metalled the majority of the way. A mere three-to-five minutes into the walk on your left behind a large matai is the first of the 'witch' trees. A twisted, gnarled totara that evokes all sorts of witchy poo thoughts from a bygone era. I am no botanist but I spotted an unusual fern similar to a *Blechnum fluvatile* (which means 'by running water') except that the leaves are a very dark green, apparently it is Pellaea, which is a species commonly sold as an indoor plant. Look up as you walk along, the trees have lots of vines that could be either native jasmine, clematis or Muehlenbeckia, which entwine themselves around the trees amidst a canopy that sways and groans in the breeze (goblin noises perhaps). Up and over the steps you are confronted by a delightful ferny glade interspersed with bush lilies (*Astelia fragrans* - which look like flax plants). On the right just beyond the second set of steps is a large matai (with a hammer-marked trunk) with soft green lichen and red juvenile growth. The back side of this one is interesting, have a look. I began

to think the bellbirds and tuis who were eating the totara berries were getting 'high' as they began to puff themselves up and whistled and sang mightily. I have since discovered that bellbirds and tuis are both aggressive and without a doubt they were having a 'face off' over the succulent berries available in that area.

Look and listen closely here, there are bellbirds, kereru (wood pigeon), waxeyes, fantails, grey warblers and cicadas. The trees have acquired some weird shapes over the years. Masses of vines are visible from the top of the next set of steps. The understorey is mainly black mapou (Pittosporum – which means pitchy or sticky seed) and very sparse.

By the next steps, an alien invader has infiltrated my goblin forest, it is elderberry and regardless of age needs pulled out! Next up on the left is an imposing totara, perched on a barish bank it resembles a many horned 'whatsit'. According to the experts, lots of branches growing from the lower part of the trunk means that the tree grew up with little or no vegetation crowding it. I prefer to think that the trees got together and decided that if they grew ugly and misshapen they would not be cut down for timber. The bush in this reserve is growing on sand dunes and is nationally significant as one of the few remnants of bush growing on sand dunes in New Zealand.

Jasmine seedlings looking suspiciously like junior lancewood are prevalent here. Now we have a massive dark, sombre matai with branches spread like an overweight witch with flabs of cellulite hanging from her arms. A little further on is a friendly totara reaching out with a curved arm from the side of the track inviting you to rest within the crook of its elbow.

Dead trees with many huhu grub holes are visible here. Years ago you would have been able to see kaka here, gouging out the holes in search of a tasty meal. Now the twisty shapes begin in earnest, see the faces... leftovers from the dinosaur age turned to wood (makes a change from stone). Don't pick up the fungi you see here, some are actually dog doodoos! Downhill now with no steps and by the handrail on your right, spot the



Totara

jasmine climbing up the climbing vine. Left hand side 20 seconds further on is a long unpronounceable botanical name (hounds tongue fern growing on a broken limb). Look left again because within a moment you will come across a totara that resembles a headless gym fanatic, ie two large 'heavily oiled muscle-bound arms holding up four javelins'. Look closer at the wonderful bark patterns. All around here are the menacing twisted goblin trees, you only have to use your imagination. At the next dead matai on the left check out the hieroglyphic patterns carved into the tree by an insect - What can you see? I found Snoopy, a rabbit, lizard and a ghost before I was forcibly removed by my companion!

By the next handrail on the left is a notable tree hundreds of years old, conspicuous by the small white sign at its base. Don't knock it, you wouldn't look too good either with a few 100 years added to your age.

Almost back to the beginning or if you are pedantic the end, I hope you didn't zoom round it in the 30 minutes it states on the sign, you really do need to take your time, look up, look down, look closely and listen, there is heaps to see and hear. Do it at dusk!!

## Otatara Pestbusters update

Numbers of Otatara home owners joining Pestbusters are slowly increasing, but there are still many of you out there we would like to hear from. Firstly those who have been controlling pests on your properties by some means for ages – don't just say 'I'm doing my own thing' – we would like to give you a cute letterbox decal to show everyone you are being responsible; we would also like to have you on our list, it won't cost you anything!

Next – even though you haven't seen any rats doesn't mean you don't have any! Around your compost bin or near the hen-house would be a great place to have a bait station. These cost just a few dollars and are available from 49 Bryson Road, Wednesday afternoons 3-6pm and Saturday mornings, 9.30 – 12.30.

Many people are noticing more kereru, tuis and bellbirds this year than ever before. We believe this is because so many responsible people are dealing to the rats and possums.

Become a responsible person! Phone 2130530 or come along to 49 Bryson Road for your pest-busting products.

Members of the Pestbusters are also looking after the Council Reserves, so why don't you do your bit as well? See our website, [www.Otatara-Pestbusters.org](http://www.Otatara-Pestbusters.org).

# Southland Community Nursery news

*Linda Jackson*

The Southland Community Nursery at 185 Grant Road and run by local plant experts Chris and Brian Rance, offers advice and resources for growing and maintaining native plants and gardens.

Open on most Friday mornings, everyone is welcome to join in a range of activities, including seed gathering and sowing, propagating, potting and general nursery maintenance. Kids come and play in the sandpit and feed the friendly ducks, students arrive to fulfil Duke of Edinburgh



In November pre-school children visited the nursery and bush restoration area.



volunteering service or undertake research, visitors, local and from overseas join a regular crowd who bring delicious morning tea treats.

This friendly and generous community facility, run on a voluntary basis, offers a great opportunity to meet others with similar interests, with the bonus of access to a wide range of healthy, locally sourced and grown native plants.

To find out more come along on a Friday or visit [www.southlandcommunitynursery.org.nz](http://www.southlandcommunitynursery.org.nz)

## Community Nursery events

- Seed collecting (Fridays in March-May)
- Native Plant sale Saturday 6 April
- Cuttings workshops Friday 21 and Friday 28 June
- Education Centre opening – watch this space!

## Native plant sales

If you can't get to the plant sale on Saturday 6 April and want to get planting sooner, give Chris a call or email to arrange a suitable time to view plants for sale. All plants are \$4 each, PB3 size. Sales contribute to the Community Nursery Charitable Trust and the building of the new Education Centre.

# Ten worst weeds in Otatara

The Otatara Landcare Group says the 10 worst weeds in Otatara are:

- Sycamore (a canopy dominant tree that spreads hundreds of seedlings)
- Darwin's barberry (a shrub that tolerates shade, with bird dispersed berries)
- Old man's beard (a climber that suffocates all that it grows over)
- Elderberry (a tree that tolerates shade and has bird dispersed berries)
- Chilean flame creeper (smothers native vegetation, grows from a bulb and is very difficult to kill)
- Aluminium weed (ground cover that smothers native seedlings and dominates the ground)
- Pampas grass (often confused with native toetoe. It dominates coastal areas)
- Cotoneaster (a shrub with bird dispersed fruits)

- Ivy (a vine that strangles trees that it grows up)
- Holly (a dominating tree with bird dispersed berries)

Weeds are just plants in the wrong place. 'Wrong place' can be a subjective matter but if you want to protect native bush in Otatara, this list of weeds is a good place to start. All are very fast growing, faster than native plants, most either dominate the canopy, smother by covering and produce lots of seeds, and therefore seedlings. Those with bird-dispersed seeds can invade native forest areas.

For more information about weeds in Southland contact Environment Southland or visit [www.es.govt.nz/environment/pests/plants](http://www.es.govt.nz/environment/pests/plants) for factsheets on many of the weeds on the list.

Similarly [www.weedbusters.org.nz](http://www.weedbusters.org.nz) has lots of good information about weeds and a useful booklet to download – *Plant Me Instead*.

# Rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*)

*Chris Morison*

Chances are you will be seeing the occasional rabbit here in Otatara this summer. Southland had a winter that will have favoured low rabbit mortality. Winter was followed by an excellent spring for grass growth and I am sure the rabbits will have taken every opportunity to make more rabbits and increase their populations exponentially. Here in Otatara we have been killing many mustelids (stoats, weasels and ferrets) to assist survival the native birds, reptiles and invertebrates as well as saving the chooks in the hen house. Mustelids will have kept the rabbit population under control so without their predation there is a high probability there will be an increase in rabbit numbers.



A rabbit relaxes on holiday at Chris and Brian Rance's property, Christmas 2012.

## What threats do rabbits pose to you and our environment?

Rabbits are grazers and browsers and can compete with stock for food, or damage young trees and crops. You may see impacts on your vegetable and flower gardens and bare patches in the paddocks. They may be frustrating you by their very presence especially for those people who have seen rabbits populations controlled by the rabbit board and in more recent years by a virus. Over-grazing on pastures and rabbit warrens may exacerbate erosion issues. Marram grass was planted on the Oreti Beach foreshore to secure the sand after rabbits destroyed the native vegetation that held the sand. Rabbit burrows may cause walking hazards for the unwary and their burrows are certainly becoming hazards on golf courses near Otatara.

## Pest status

Environment Southland classifies the rabbit as a 'suppression pest'. A suppression pest means a pest that is widespread in suitable habitat. The goal is to suppress this pest so that impacts on the community and the environment are minimized.

## What are the solutions?

Rabbit control is the land owner/occupier responsibility.

- Poisoning: During the summer when feed is plentiful, poisoning is not ideal. There is no reason for the rabbit to eat the bait while there is plenty of feed available. The best time for poisoning is during winter. Pindone is the only poison available to the general public for rabbit control. It is incorporated into a cereal-based pellet which has proved highly acceptable to rabbits.
- Fumigants: Magtoxin is a fumigant that is very effective for rabbits in burrows, especially young rabbits can be hard to kill by other means.
- Shooting is very effective but is not an option in urban areas for safety reasons.
- Protective devices and fencing will help protect areas where rabbits are likely to cause regular damage, especially gardens. Try wire netting, drums with their top and bottom removed, corrugated iron and wind cloth pegged securely to the ground.
- Repellents may deter rabbits from eating plants by rendering them unpalatable. There are commercial products available and a variety of homemade repellents can be found on the internet.

Environment Southland has a factsheet giving information on rabbits and their control – [www.es.govt.nz/media/11711/rabbits.pdf](http://www.es.govt.nz/media/11711/rabbits.pdf)

## The history of the rabbit

*Lloyd Esler*

*Rabbits were introduced to Otago in 1863 following a voyage aboard the Helenslee to provide sport for hunting – I guess wekas just weren't fast enough! The impact of rabbits was almost immediate and within a decade or two there was an estimated 100 million in Otago and Southland – that's six per acre!*

*Various control methods were tried – poison, shooting, dogs, trapping, gassing and smoking them from their warrens. But it was the introduction of mustelids that solved the problem. For all its negative effects on native fauna, the stoat deserves a bronze statue as the animal that saved agriculture in Southland.*

*Rabbits, now more-or-less manageable, became a valuable source of meat and skins. At one time New Zealand exported massive quantities of tinned and frozen rabbit meat and millions of pelts. Even after the rabbit was de-commercialised, skins were apparently smuggled to Britain pressed into the middle of bales of wool. The London buyer had been advised of the serial numbers on the bales he needed to bid for.*

*Rabbits were an important source of food and income in the depression. These days they are not eaten much and with the end of local pest destruction boards, rabbit control has been patchy.*

*I am collecting information and photos relating to the story of rabbits in Otago and Southland. Can you help?*

# What plant is that?

## How to find out...

- Bring a plant along for identification to the Community Nursery on Friday mornings
- Arrange a visit to your property by an Otatara Landcare Group committee member
- Look in the booklet *Natural Otatara* – available for \$5 from Otatara 4 Square, Dunns Road
- Look on the *NZ Plant Conservation Network* website [www.nzpcn.org.nz](http://www.nzpcn.org.nz)
- Look on the *Southland Community Nursery* website for common Southland plants [www.southlandcommunitynursery.org.nz](http://www.southlandcommunitynursery.org.nz)

Do you know what plant this is?

# Explorers Club

## Lloyd Esler

After a gap of a few years the Southland Explorers Club will be coming out of hibernation. Explorers is a Young Naturalists Club for children 7-13ish who aspire to be David Attenborough. In past years the club ran frequent fieldtrips, regular meetings and occasional camps. It is for young people who would sooner be out experiencing the real world than pushing buttons or staring at a flickering screen. The focus is on beaches, bush, birds, fossils, bugs and rivers. An initial meeting for interested parents and children will be held at 7pm on Thursday 28 February at the Hearing Association Rooms 126 Leet Street. The first fieldtrip, to Tiwai Point, will be on the afternoon of Saturday 2 March.

If this sounds like a club for your child, please contact Lloyd Esler, ph 2130404 or email [esler@southnet.co.nz](mailto:esler@southnet.co.nz)



Answer – native clematis (*Clematis paniculata*)



## Bird of the month

It's time to look at the cattle egret. In the past couple of months there have been up to five feeding on the low-lying pasture along both sides of Stead Street. They are distinctive birds, pure white with a yellow bill, like a smaller and more hunched variety of the White heron. Cattle egrets have been migrating from Australia since the 1960s, arriving in autumn and departing in spring. Clearly they are muddled migrants with the northern hemisphere mindset that makes them head south for the winter instead of north. After a decade of declining numbers where the Southland population fell from about 350 to a mere handful, the numbers seem to be on the rise again and perhaps they will start breeding. They have been waiting a long time. Other Aussie migrants, such as the spoonbill, Spur-winged plover, swallow and White-faced heron settled in almost immediately are have become some of our commonest birds. Why the name? Cattle egrets are insect eaters, often associating with cattle and eating the flies they attract. They are the most widespread bird in the world as well and the only one to have reached all seven continents. They are extraordinarily light and with their huge wing area they get wafted around the world like thistledown. Reports of Cattle egrets and any other unusual birds, live or dead, are

welcomed by the Southland Bird Study Group which has been recently formed to collect data on birds. Email Lloyd Esler at [esler@southnet.co.nz](mailto:esler@southnet.co.nz) or phone 2130404.



Cattle egret

### Looking Up

Linda Jackson

*I watched a Heron Flight School last spring. Eight, what looked like half-sized herons, launched from the macrocarpa tops where up to a dozen adult birds often roost – graceful pterodactyls gliding to within the parameters their parents set, growing in grace and skill every minute of the half hour or so they sailed above my paddock. I only saw them once, but looked for them days after. A perfect picture to remember.*

# Cleanup day

*Lloyd Esler*

On 11 May 20 students from Meeker Middle School in Tacoma, Washington, cleaned up around Daffodil Bay. This group is on an exchange visit with James Hargest Junior, whose travelling students helped with a tree-planting day in Washington when they were there last year. Equipped with gloves and bags the kids rummaged in the undergrowth

around the grassy bits of Daffodil Bay and unearthed an astonishing number of old glass and plastic bottles, plastic, chip packets and cans. We had a bit of an estuary study as well, then took them out to Oreti Beach where they found toheroas and Triangle shells. It's a bit of a disgrace when visitors have to pick up our rubbish for us isn't it?



Students from Meeker Middle School in Tacoma, Washington, at Daffodil Bay.



